

**Muslims concerned about government's reaction since Sept. 11**

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DATELINE: CHICAGO

Farhan Tahir doesn't hide the fact that he's Muslim, despite the attention focused on followers of Islam since the Sept. 11 attacks.

"In fact, now, I clearly tell people I'm a Muslim," said Tahir, a U.S. citizen and native of Pakistan who comes to pray at the Downtown Islamic Center.

For Tahir, a corporate travel consultant, it's a way to educate people about his religion. But while many Muslims have been encouraged by the unprecedented opportunity to talk about the positive aspects of Islam, they are increasingly discouraged by the scrutiny from the federal government, said Mohammed Kaiseruddin, assistant chairman of the Downtown Islamic Center.

"The government has been saying, and I hope they mean, that it's not about Islam, it's about the terrorism," said Kaiseruddin, originally from India and a U.S. citizen for 20-plus years. "But the actions seem to be so broad that they give the impression that it is going against Islam and Muslims rather than simply terrorists."

In recent weeks, federal law enforcement officials have raided three Islamic charity groups with offices in suburban Chicago, citing suspected links to terrorism. Charity officials have denied any links to terrorism, and Kaiseruddin said the government's actions have made it harder for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation of charitable giving.

Law enforcement officials around the country also are in the process of questioning some 5,000 young foreign, mostly Middle Eastern, men from around the country as part of the U.S. Justice Department's investigation. Some of those being questioned are in Illinois. And some Muslims have been detained over visa issues.

For many Muslims, the changes they've seen since Sept. 11 have been more subtle, such as an insulting comment or suspicious look.

"I am what I am, this is the way I am, you like me or you dislike me," said Syed Shahab Imam, a Muslim who sports a beard and came to this country from Pakistan almost 30 years ago. He became a U.S. citizen in 1978.

However, Imam and other Muslims praying at the downtown center are quick to point out that many people do treat them kindly.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat whose district stretches into Chicago's northern suburbs and includes a large Muslim population, said feelings of discomfort persist in the Muslim community.

"I think there is definitely a feeling still of being on edge and being vulnerable," she said.

Efforts are being made to ease those feelings. For example, Schakowsky sponsored a solidarity march in her district shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks and students from a Catholic girls high school on Chicago's southwest side have exchanged visits with Muslim girls who attend school in suburban Chicago.

Kaiseruddin believes Muslims will remain under the microscope as long as Osama Bin Laden is on the loose.

"I hope it will end after Osama Bin Laden is captured and brought to justice," he said. "But what my fear is is that he will not be captured."